



INAUGURAL CEREMONY
SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION
MR. ABDELWAHAD RADI

His Excellency, the President of the Republic of Ecuador,
Honourable Speaker of the National Assembly,
Distinguished Representative of the UN Secretary-General,
Secretary General of the IPU,
Distinguished Ministers,
Honourable Speakers of Parliament and distinguished leaders of delegations,
Dear colleagues and delegates of the 128th IPU Assembly,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me, Mr. President, to begin by expressing the IPU's heartfelt thanks to you, and to the people of Ecuador, for the warm and friendly welcome you have extended to us. We are delighted to spend some days in your magnificent country. I would also like to congratulate you on your brilliant second re-election as Head of State. Under your able leadership, Ecuador is experiencing a dynamic process of political, institutional and developmental renaissance. In this regard, the concept of "buen vivir", a key pillar of the country's strong environmental and social ambitions, is enshrined in the 2008 Constitution. It provides many of us with food for thought.

Allow me again, Mr. President, dear colleagues, to express my sincere thanks to the Speaker of the National Assembly for inviting the Inter-Parliamentary Union to hold its 128th Assembly here in Quito. I also wish to congratulate him on his brilliant re-election to the National Assembly of Quito and as Chair of the Group of Latin America and the Caribbean – GRULAC - at the IPU. You have had a truly illustrious career, Hon. Speaker.

Mr. President,
Ladies and gentlemen,

We are gathering in troubled times, with economic and financial turmoil, armed conflicts and myriad threats to global stability. After the shock of the 2008 financial crisis, economic recovery is painfully slow. Moreover, the uncertainty that continues to surround any prospects for a solution to the global financial crisis weighs heavily and directly on the future of the most vulnerable populations. The financial crisis has left a trail of tragic consequences everywhere. Conflict and discrimination continue to destroy lives and communities as far as the eye can see.

In Syria, the bloody conflict that has been ongoing for two years now still threatens to engulf the Middle East and may well result in the violence spreading beyond the region. But this is not the only conflict; there are many others. Indeed, a new conflict has broken out in Mali, jeopardizing its independence, unity and territorial integrity, and this is just the latest in a series of armed clashes that jeopardize the lives of millions of people.

As far as the Middle East is concerned, we call for the resumption of serious negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis because peace is the only way forward. The IPU will support all political initiatives in this case aimed at reviving dialogue and restoring peace in the region.

In order to maintain economic balance or peace in the world, the IPU advocates dialogue, compliance with international law and deeper international and inter-parliamentary cooperation, through which it also seeks to strengthen the institution of parliament and by the same token, democracy.

Mr. President,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am firmly convinced that parliaments have the power to help shape a different world, a better world, simply by questioning policies, ratifying international agreements, passing laws and holding governments to account for what they do or fail to do. They also have the responsibility to represent the concerns of their people and to protect them.

Parliaments have a pivotal role to play in democratic governance as they implement strategies, plans and policies required to achieve set objectives.

We also know that parliaments can do a lot to promote political tolerance, harmony and understanding. Let us not forget that peace and prosperity are not possible without respect for different political persuasions and a genuine willingness to settle disputes through dialogue. If there is one lesson to be learned from the upheavals throughout the world, it is the paramount importance of political plurality on the one hand and of dialogue to achieve peace and security on the other.

In most countries emerging from conflict or in transition, the parliament is faced with the enormity of the tasks at hand. This is where the IPU intervenes. It provides direct assistance to a number of parliaments. This is the case, for example, of Egypt's Majlis Ash-Shura, where experts were dispatched to assist the Shura Assembly in drafting a new electoral law. The IPU recommended that the law contain provisions allowing a better representation of women in the parliament. The IPU has signed a cooperation agreement with the transitional parliament in Libya and has put in place in Myanmar, along with the parliament, a long-term strategy to develop the institution. The first phase started at the beginning of this year. Lastly, in Palestine, the IPU is pursuing its project in support of the administration of the Palestinian Legislative Council. This will primarily entail fleshing out various functions and internal procedures.

Mr. President,
Dear colleagues,

We have come here to also discuss more specifically how development can serve the cause of social justice. This is a strong and widely shared aspiration throughout the world. Indeed, citizens on all continents are demanding development governance so that all can benefit from development. The theme chosen for this Assembly could not be any clearer: *From unrelenting growth to purposeful development "Buen Vivir": New approaches, new solutions.*

This "Buen Vivir", which our hosts hold so dear, is also linked to democratic governance. It would be highly desirable in each country for governments and those they govern to abide by the new set of development objectives currently being worked out. This presupposes establishing ties between political leaders and opinion shapers, and thus with parliaments. The post-2015 development objectives will be useless, or will have little more use than the Millennium Development Goals, without the resolute and concrete support of parliaments and citizens.

Today, there would be no reason not to be able to define a measurable goal linked to democracy

or, if you prefer, to democratic governance. It could come with criteria such as participation, inclusion, transparency and accountability. And the progress made in these areas could be measured through indicators developed over the past 15 years. The IPU has undertaken to establish a set of indicators for democratic parliaments which it hopes to complete by 2014. Several parliaments have assisted it in this endeavour. These indicators could be useful in defining the post-2015 democratic governance goal and corresponding targets.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Our Assembly will also be discussing other issues.

The First Standing Committee will be debating *Enforcing the responsibility to protect: The role of parliament in safeguarding civilians' lives*. The responsibility to protect was recognized by the United Nations in 2005. This concept, which is gradually becoming widely accepted, consists of a set of principles based on the premise that power is not a privilege but rather a responsibility. It seeks to prevent and counter four types of crimes: genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing, all of which are considered as mass atrocities. The UN Secretary-General Ban-ki Moon said "by assisting States to meet their core protection responsibilities, it seeks to strengthen rather than weaken sovereignty".

The second issue that will be debated here in Quito is *Fair trade and innovative financing mechanisms for sustainable development*. Regarding financing for development, it is imperative for developed countries to honour their commitments, especially by allocating 0.7 per cent of their gross national product (GNP) to official development assistance (ODA) by 2015, and to respect the principles of aid effectiveness. These innovative financing mechanisms facilitate the mobilization of "predictable aid flows" to meet the basic needs of populations in a sustainable manner.

Dear colleagues,

The third issue inevitably brings us back to democracy in all its aspects, and more specifically, to the link between democracy and new technologies: *The use of media, including social media, to enhance citizen engagement and democracy*.

The Internet explosion and the rapid expansion of information and communication technologies bring with them new options and pose new challenges to parliamentarians. The more this kind of interaction becomes popular, the more parliamentarians will be prompted to go beyond traditional practices to get closer to citizens and enable them to participate actively in developing policies and programmes and related debates. Social media also provide an alternative platform for political and social engagement by certain groups, including women, who are sometimes excluded from traditional platforms.

Excellency, dear colleagues,

In addition to these debates there will also be a number of panel discussions, workshops and other sessions on topics as diverse as they are fascinating. I will not elaborate further, but there is one event I am particularly looking forward to – the Meeting of Young Parliamentarians. I cannot claim to be one of them but I welcome the fact that they are slowly taking root at the IPU.

Fellow parliamentarians,

I cannot conclude without raising a serious matter that is of the greatest concern to me: violence against women, in particular sexual violence.

The figures are appalling: six out of 10 women in the world will experience some form of physical or sexual violence in their lifetime; one in five women will be a victim of rape or attempted rape at some point in her life; 35 per cent of murders of women in the world are committed by an intimate partner; each year 14.2 million girls are married before their 18th birthday and 3.3 million might undergo genital mutilation.

Every day the media carry stories of particularly shocking cases of rape and other forms of sexual violence committed throughout the world. It is high time that these crimes are punished universally for what they really are: unacceptable attacks on the fundamental human right to physical integrity. That is why we will not be able to close our Assembly in Quito without speaking out strongly against this global scourge.

Dear colleagues,

I would like to issue a gentle reminder to all of you that we are also in Quito to take decisions about our Organization. Our wish is to make it stronger, more effective, more diligent and better positioned to tackle the challenges of our time. We have received proposals aimed at making our Assemblies and Standing Committees more efficient instruments of parliamentary diplomacy. At the same time, we intend to enhance our ability to communicate. To do that, we will have to take a decision on our visual identity. I need your support to carry out these tasks so that we can leave Quito with the feeling of not only having rejuvenated our Organization but also of having given it a dynamic and modern image.

Dear colleagues,

You are the main actors in these unique global parliamentary meetings that are IPU Assemblies, and I thank you for coming in such large numbers and from so far to Quito. I wish you all, delegates and organizers, a very successful 128th Assembly, which it certainly will be.

Thank you.